

THIS MONTH

Welcome to a very special *What's New* section: our second annual awards. This year we've increased the number of awards to 56, and included broadband suppliers, making these the most comprehensive awards in the UK.

VALUE ADDED

Computer Shopper is dedicated to helping you find the best-value kit there is, and our awards reflect this. Rather than give awards to the shiniest, most expensive kit, we reward products that are the best value. We love new technology, but ground-breaking products need to offer great value before we'll include them. We insist that all the products we review are available, as there's no point in an award winner if you can't buy it.

We understand that everyone has different needs, and our awards recognise that. Each of our *What's New* categories has an overall winner, but we've also given three other awards in each category that we feel deserve a recommendation, too. No matter what your budget or need, this issue is your ultimate buying guide.

The reason we can give you so many best buys is because we review more kit than any other magazine. In fact, we review on average almost 70 per cent more kit than our nearest rival every month. For this year's awards we had to look through more than 1,800 product reviews to pick the winners.

The reason we can do this is because we have the UK's biggest labs, and all our writers are experts in their own fields. This makes our awards the most comprehensive and authoritative.

HOW THE AWARDS WORK

All our product awards are given by our team of experts. Each expert looked through the past 12 months of reviews and picked out their recommendations for each of their *What's New* sections, taking into account the latest prices. Our panel of senior editors then looked through recommendations to make sure that each product was an excellent product at an excellent price.

Finally, we awarded the best product with the overall category award. These products are identified by their gold logos and top billings. Three other products were then chosen as sub-category winners. These are identified by their silver logos.



Gold award winners are the stand-out products and companies in each market sector

Every award-winner is the best of its kind

READERS' VOTES

PC systems and notebook PCs just aren't on sale long enough to give individual products an award, so we turned to you to help us out. In our recent Satisfaction Survey we asked you who you bought your PCs and notebooks from, and if you would buy the same make again. The more people that say 'yes' to a company, the better rated that company is. We present this figure as a percentage of the people who would buy again from each company.

We also averaged all the review scores for each manufacturer over the past 12 months, displaying the result as a percentage (five stars is 100 per cent; two stars is 40 per cent). By taking the average of reviews performance and the percentage of readers that would buy again, we got our top four companies.

The best Broadband Supplier is a new category for us, and it's entirely reader-voted. We asked who your broadband supplier is, if you're planning to change and if you'd recommend it. By averaging the percentage who aren't planning to change and the percentage who'd recommend their supplier, we found the top companies.

We think we've come up with the definitive list of quality products and manufacturers, and we're confident that whatever you're looking for, you'll find it in the next 13 sections.

Jim Martin
Reviews Editor



jim@computershopper.co.uk

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2007 Satisfaction Survey

Three months ago we asked you to tell us about your PC purchases. Now, as part of our awards issue, we can reveal which companies provide the best service

In our September 2007 issue we launched our survey to measure readers' satisfaction with their recent PC and notebook purchases. The online survey was promoted on our website, in the magazine and through our email newsletter. Our aim was to rate the standards of service provided by the main PC and notebook manufacturers.

A record number of *Computer Shopper* readers answered our call, giving us detailed information about thousands of notebook and PC purchases. This data has given us a good indication of what it's like to buy and own each company's products.

THE RESULTS

While the purchase information helped us decide which companies would be entered into our awards, we also wanted to find out what you like and what you don't like. Last year 70 per cent of you didn't like using call centres; this year it's 76 per cent. It shows that the more customers have to deal with outsourced support, the more companies alienate their customers.

It's probably no big surprise that 83 per cent of you don't want to pay for extended warranties and that 82 per cent prioritise value over service. What is interesting, though, is that 86 per cent of you haven't had a major support issue, up from 82 per cent from last year. This shows that PC hardware is more reliable and service is generally better. In the face of a problem, you're willing to deal with technical support in a range of different

ways, using email and online forums as well as the phone. You're all quite technical, too, and 81 per cent of you would happily fix a PC problem if you were provided with the parts.

One of the biggest complaints that you can have about a company is poor support when something does go wrong. We wanted to find out what kinds of problems you encountered when you had to make a support call. Our graph (below left) shows the biggest problems, but it's interesting to see that two of the biggest culprits this year are a long wait for an answer and constantly being redirected elsewhere. These are up by four per cent and two per cent respectively from last year. Fortunately, the number of PC problems that went unresolved has fallen by four per cent to 17 per cent this year.

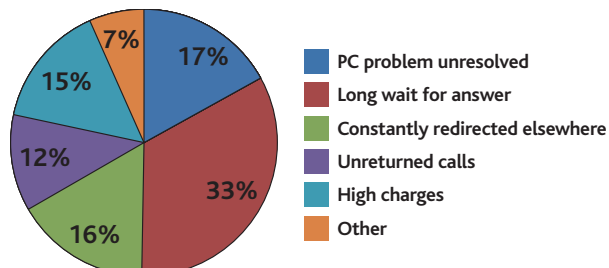
BROADBAND SUPPLIERS

This is the first year that we've asked you about your broadband provider, and the results make for interesting reading. Price is the main reason for choosing a provider, but it's not the only one. We were surprised to see that 19 per cent of you chose a supplier because of its reputation, while 16 per cent want an uncapped service. It's clear that *Computer Shopper's* readers know exactly what they want from products and services.

Finally, a big thank you to all our readers that completed the survey. These awards wouldn't be possible without your help, and the information helps us to plan future issues and make the magazine an even better read.

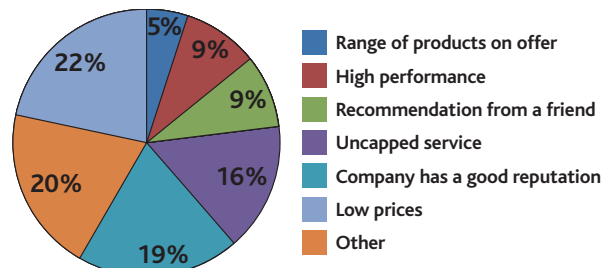
Support problems

The biggest problems faced when making a support call



Broadband choice

Why *Shopper* readers choose a broadband provider



This month What's New Reviews



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Gigabyte 3D Rocket II	★★★★



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Avanquest Ghostsurf 2007	★★★★
Bioshock	★★★★
IMSI TurboCAD Deluxe 14	★★★★
Medal of Honor: Airborne	★★★★
Paragon Hard Disk Manager 8.5	★★★★
The Settlers: Rise of an Empire	★★★★
Steganos Password Manager 2007	★★★★

AWARDS 2007 PC SYSTEMS

EXPERT'S REPORT

Our PC and Notebook awards are given to manufacturers, not products, as particular PCs aren't on sale for long enough to make a product award worthwhile. To choose the winners we first looked at the percentage of readers that would buy from each company again. Next, we wanted to take into account how well each manufacturer performed in *Computer Shopper* reviews in the past 12 months. To do this we added up every review score a company's products had achieved, averaged it and converted it into a percentage. By combining the 'buy again' and review scores we arrived at a final score, and the top four companies win awards.

The process we used is quite simple, but the results are quite surprising. All the companies listed have done very well to get this far and we're sure you'll enjoy the results.

Jim Martin
Reviews Editor



jim@computershopper.co.uk



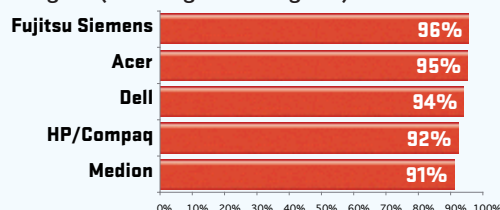
DELL

For the second year running, Dell has topped the charts. Founded in 1984, it's the world's largest PC manufacturer. Dell has worked hard in the past year and has increased its market share of *Shopper* readers to a massive 24 per cent, more than double its nearest competitor.

Dell has also managed to increase the proportion of readers who'd buy a PC from the firm again to 94 per cent. The third-highest score of the group, it shows that people who buy a computer from Dell have confidence in the company. Part of this decision is based on the support that the company offers, and shows that it's doing something right. Remember, supporting PCs is harder than notebooks, so this score is an indication of a lot of hard work. The company listens to its customers, too, providing Windows XP and Linux as options on PCs that it sells.

This is the first year that Dell has abandoned its policy of selling only Intel-based PCs. It is now selling computers with AMD processors as well, and as the

Top 5 performers: Would you buy the same make of PC again? (Percentage answering 'Yes')



Shopper review performance	80%
Readers who would buy again	94%
Shopper reader market share	24%

market share and satisfaction scores show, this is clearly something you wanted.

All this would mean nothing without good review performance, but Dell has shone for the second year in a row, increasing performance from 70 per cent last year to a huge 80 per cent this year. We hope that this level of improvement will continue over the next 12 months. For now, though, Dell can sit back and congratulate itself on a job well done. The level of service and quality delivered in the past year means that Dell wins our Best PC Manufacturer award.

SALES 0870 152 4699 DETAILS www.dell.co.uk
FOUNDED 1984 EMPLOYEES 88,000



PC NEXTDAY

PC Nextday has been a regular in our *What's New* and *Labs* pages over the past couple of years.



We're big fans of the company's PCs; the 87 per cent reviews performance score is the joint highest in the awards.

Shopper readers are also fans, with 82 per cent willing to buy a PC from the company again. It shows that PC Nextday has worked hard to gain its customers' trust.

Strong reviews performance as well as impressing our readers puts PC Nextday in a strong position. For these reasons we're happy to give the company our Commended PC Manufacturer 2007 award.

SALES 0870 609 0125
DETAILS www.pcnextday.co.uk
FOUNDED 1993 EMPLOYEES 70

Shopper review performance	87%
Readers who would buy again	82%
Shopper reader market share	2%



MESH

Mesh enjoys a 12 per cent market share, making it the second largest supplier of PCs to *Shopper* readers.



The company backs this up with excellent reviews performance, as the score of 87 per cent shows.

However, Mesh doesn't quite make it into the list of the top five companies that readers would buy from again. Still, it has increased its score by three per cent from last year, showing that its support is moving in the right direction.

With its large market share and excellent reviews performance, improving its customer relations even further could see Mesh become the top PC supplier.

SALES 08447 360440
DETAILS www.meshcomputers.com
FOUNDED 1987 EMPLOYEES 150

Shopper review performance	87%
Readers who would buy again	79%
Shopper reader market share	12%



FUJITSU SIEMENS

Fujitsu Siemens is an unexpected entry on our awards list, as the company has never featured before.



However, it's done something right to impress *Shopper* readers, as a stunning 96 per cent of you would happily buy from the firm again.

It is slightly let down by the reviews performance; the PCs we've reviewed have tended to be expensive and underpowered compared to the competition.

Over the next 12 months we'd like to see better-value products from Fujitsu Siemens. A higher score here would make the company a contender for the winner's spot.

SALES 01344 475000
DETAILS www.fujitsusiemens.com
FOUNDED 1999 EMPLOYEES 4,000

Shopper review performance	50%
Readers who would buy again	96%
Shopper reader market share	2%

CYBERPOWER

Gamer Infinity Silent Edition

★★★★★

£899 inc VAT

CyberPower's Gamer Infinity Silent Edition is the first PC we've seen with Intel's Core 2 Duo E6750 processor (our Best Component 2007 award winner) and P35 motherboard chipset. Although the P35 can support newer DDR3 memory, the Infinity's motherboard only supports older DDR2 RAM. However, it is still impressively fast, as the results of our applications benchmarks show. It managed an excellent score of 329 in our tough video-encoding test.

The Infinity is also a powerful gaming computer, as the results of our 3D benchmarks show. The Nvidia GeForce 8800GTS graphics card will be able to cope with the new DirectX 10 games that are beginning to appear, although the 320MB of memory could limit the quality settings.

As its name suggests, the Infinity is supposed to be quieter than other gaming PCs. The interior of its case is lined with foam to help reduce noise but, although it

is quieter than other CyberPower PCs we've tested, it's not a significant difference. The fans are still audible in a hushed room.

The 22in widescreen display has an anti-glare instead of a glossy finish, which reduces reflections from overhead lights. Colours are bright and the screen is evenly lit, but we noticed some banding and speckling in our greyscale and colour transitions tests. It also has a built-in iPod dock as well as a memory card reader and four-port USB2 hub.

As well as charging and synchronising your iPod, it can play music from it using the built-in speakers when your computer is off. They're not very loud, though, and sound muffled. Although these extra features are useful, we would have preferred a separate, high-quality speaker set instead.

If the roomy 400GB hard disk isn't spacious enough, there are four 3½in drive bays for adding extra disks. You could also fill the two external

3½in bays with hard disks instead of a memory card reader and floppy drive. There's also room for three more optical drives, but there are only three SATA ports, so you'd need to install a SATA PCI card if you want to fill all the drive bays.

Adding PCI peripherals could be tricky since one of the PCI slots is pressed up tightly against the graphics card. The other PCI slot and the PCI-E x1 slot could be blocked off if you add another PCI-E x16 graphics card to boost 3D performance. The Infinity's Nvidia graphics card is mismatched with a motherboard that supports ATI's CrossFire dual graphics card technology instead of Nvidia's SLI, so you must replace it with two ATI cards to take advantage of CrossFire.

The Infinity is a fast in both Windows applications and games, but the internal expansion options could make upgrading expensive and difficult.

Alan Lu



SUMMARY

- ✓ Fast in Windows and games
- ✓ Plenty of drive bays
- ✗ Poor expansion options

DESKTOP PC 2.66GHz Intel Core 2 Duo E6750, 2GB RAM, 400GB hard disk, 320MB Nvidia GeForce 8800GTS, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 22in widescreen LCD
 SUPPLIER CyberPower 08000 190863
 DETAILS www.cyberpowersystem.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 62)



APPLE

20-inch iMac

★★★★★

£949 inc VAT

The latest version of Apple's all-in-one iMac retains the same overall shape and size of previous models but has a sleek black plastic and aluminium design. It's classy and resembles an LCD TV more than a computer. It's slimmer than many standalone 19in LCD displays we've seen and is easy to tilt and swivel single-handed. It is almost totally silent, even during intensive tasks such as video encoding; the aluminium case becomes very warm, though.

We installed Windows Vista using Apple's Boot Camp utility and ran our usual set of benchmarks.

We were surprised to find only 1GB of RAM; we'd expect a computer at this price to have at least 2GB, especially since an extra gigabyte only costs £30. It still performed well, especially in our video-encoding test with a score of 255, but if you regularly run multiple applications simultaneously or perform memory-intensive tasks such as manipulating photos, you'll need to add more memory.

The iMac has one of ATI's latest graphics chips, the Radeon HD 2600, which is capable – in theory – of playing upcoming DirectX 10 games. As the results of our 3D tests show, though, you'll have to settle for lower graphics detail or switch to a lower resolution to play the latest titles. This is disappointing, but not unexpected since the iMac's compact case would have trouble accommodating a more powerful graphics card.

The glossy 20in display has a resolution of 1,680x1,050 pixels, which gives plenty of room to work on. It's very bright, with plenty of contrast and rich-looking colours, so it's ideal for watching films as well. Unfortunately, it's imperfect for demanding, colour-sensitive image editing. The glass front creates a lot of reflections, so you need to be careful in positioning the iMac, while even small changes in our viewing angles resulted in noticeable shifts in colour accuracy.

Apple bundles the latest version of its iLife website, photo, music, movie and music editing software with



the iMac. This can produce impressive results, but if you plan on storing a lot of video and music you may want a hard disk larger than the standard 320GB model. The iMac's compact case isn't easily upgradable though; only the RAM slots are accessible.

The keyboard is another major change from the previous iMac. The keys are much more responsive and comfortable to type on. A few keys are small and hard to press, though.

Apple's latest iMac is a quiet and well-designed all-in-one computer that's ideal if you don't have much room. But its poor screen, meagre RAM and small hard disk are all very disappointing at this price.

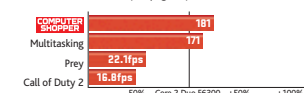
Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Compact, quiet and attractive
- ✗ Disappointing display quality
- ✗ Not enough RAM or hard disk space

DESKTOP PC 2.4GHz Intel Core 2 Duo T7700, 1GB RAM, 320GB hard disk, 256MB ATI Radeon HD 2600 Pro, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 20in widescreen LCD
 PART CODE MA876B/A
 SUPPLIER www.apple.com/uk
 0800 039 1010
 DETAILS www.apple.com/uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 62)





AWARDS 2007 NOTEBOOKS

**DELL**

Dell has managed a feat no other company has ever achieved: winning both the notebook and PC awards. The results of the notebook awards were much closer than the PC awards, and Dell had a tough fight on its hands. Here the company has only 19 per cent of the market share, while Acer has a 20 per cent share. This shows just how competitive the notebook market has become.

Dell's reviews performance was stunning. Its score of 100 per cent means that we've only had five-star products from the PC giant. This is an incredible accomplishment and shows that the kit that Dell produces is nothing less than top notch.

Dell takes joint second place, with Mesh, in the top five companies that our readers would buy from again. It's beaten only by Apple, but once someone buys an Apple notebook they don't have an alternative if they want another Mac OS notebook. For Windows-based notebook manufacturers, customers have an almost



Shopper review performance	100%
Readers who would buy again	92%
Shopper reader market share	19%

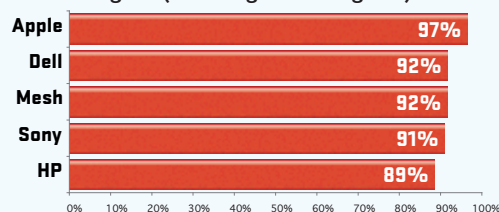
unending choice of suppliers, making Dell's score of 92 per cent even more impressive.

It shows that Dell has managed the perfect balance of value and customer support. It also suggests that Dell's notebooks are very reliable, as a high percentage of readers will flock back to buy their next notebook.

It's hats off to Dell from *Computer Shopper*, as winning both PC and notebook awards is nothing short of astounding. The company clearly deserves our Best Notebook Manufacturer 2007 award, although it will face stiff competition next year.

SALES 0870 152 4699 DETAILS www.dell.co.uk
FOUNDED 1984 EMPLOYEES 88,000

Top 5 performers: Would you buy the same make of notebook again? (Percentage answering 'Yes')



EXPERT'S REPORT

Our Best Notebook Manufacturer award, like our PC award, isn't based on products but manufacturers. To find out which were the best we included your experiences with each company and each manufacturer's review performance.

First, we looked at the percentage of readers that would buy from each company again. Next, we wanted to take into account how well each manufacturer had performed in *Computer Shopper* reviews in the past year. To do this we added every review score a company's products received and converted it into a percentage. Averaging these two percentages leads to a final score for each company, and the top four win the awards.

All of the companies listed have done very well to make it into such a select group.

Jim Martin
Reviews Editor



jim@computershopper.co.uk

**SAMSUNG**

We've generally been very impressed with Samsung's notebooks over the past year. They have been extremely well designed, well built and great to look at. Best of all, most are great value, too. You agree with us on this front, as 88 per cent of you are willing to buy from the company again. This is a clear vote of confidence for Samsung's notebooks and its customer support.

Reviews performance was good, with an overall rating of 84 per cent. Samsung was beaten here only by Lenovo and Dell. Well done, then, to Samsung for winning a Commended Notebook Manufacturer 2007 award.

SALES 01932 455000
DETAILS www.samsung.com/uk
FOUNDED 1969 EMPLOYEES 222,000

Shopper review performance	84%
Readers who would buy again	88%
Shopper reader market share	2%

**SONY**

Sony is a name that we associate with style and amazing designs. It's also a brand that *Shopper* readers associate with great quality, with 91 per cent of you willing to buy a Vaio laptop again. This shows that almost everyone that's bought a Sony notebook has been pleased with its reliability, as well as the company's customer service.

Sony's notebooks have done well in our reviews, too, with an overall performance of 80 per cent. Sony fully deserves its Commended Notebook Manufacturer award, and we look forward to reviewing more of its products next year.

SALES 08705 111 999
DETAILS www.sony.co.uk
FOUNDED 1946 EMPLOYEES 163,000

Shopper review performance	80%
Readers who would buy again	91%
Shopper reader market share	11%

**LENOVO**

IBM used to make the most reliable notebooks that money could buy. Fortunately, when Lenovo bought the brand two years ago, this trend continued. The products we've seen have all been of extremely high quality. They've also been excellent value, as the incredible 100 per cent reviews performance testifies.

This put Lenovo in contention with Dell for the winner's spot, but Dell pipped it by virtue of having slightly better reader response, with 92 per cent of you willing to buy again against Lenovo's 87 per cent.

We would not be surprised if next year a bigger proportion of you say you'll buy another Lenovo.

SALES 0808 234 4690
DETAILS www.lenovo.co.uk
FOUNDED 1984 EMPLOYEES 23,500

Shopper review performance	100%
Readers who would buy again	87%
Shopper reader market share	3%

HI-GRADE Notino D2200-01

★★★★

£723 inc VAT

At 1.95kg, the D2200-01 is at the heavier end of the ultra-portable notebook market, but the price makes it a tempting choice. The pink chassis isn't going to be to everyone's taste, but it also comes in white.

The 12.1in glossy screen has a resolution of 1,280x800 and, although it struggles a little with reproducing a full array of blue tones, it's evenly lit so colours are consistent across the screen. Our greyscale test showed a small amount of banding, but this isn't noticeable in general use. The display is relatively sturdy: there's some flexibility, but nothing too unnerving.

The chassis feels similarly well made, barely flexing under pressure, and the keyboard remains firm when typing. Its keys are a decent size, but are a little unresponsive. The touchpad responds well but the buttons below it need a firm push, which makes them uncomfortable to use. The bottom of the chassis becomes quite warm,

though it wasn't uncomfortable when we used it on our lap for long periods. It's a quiet notebook until you use the DVD drive, which whirrs loudly when reading a disc.

The 120GB hard disk offers plenty of storage, while a 1.86GHz Intel T2350 processor and 2GB of RAM handle Vista Home Premium well. The T2350 is from Intel's older Core Duo range, though, and we'd expect a current model at this price. With Intel GMA950 graphics built in, the D2200-01 failed our Call of Duty 2 test, so it

is unsuitable for modern 3D gaming.

You'll find a single D-sub output for connecting an external monitor, while the S/PDIF output will allow you to use most surround-sound systems. The built-in 1W speakers produce enough volume for music and movies but have a harsh, tinny sound.

The Notino has an internal 802.11b/g wireless card but no Bluetooth. An ExpressCard/54 slot, three USB2 ports and a single four-pin FireWire 400 port should



provide enough expansion. There's also an SD card slot for quick transfer of photos, music or documents.

Hi-Grade claims the four-cell battery will keep you up and running for two and half hours, but in our tests the D2200-01 managed only one hour and 53 minutes. An eight-cell battery is available as an upgrade for £95.

A more responsive keyboard and trackpad buttons – plus a longer-lasting battery – would make this a four-star notebook, but overall the D2200-01 isn't exceptional. A good alternative is Samsung's Q45 (*Shopper*, November 2007). It costs £76 more than the Notino, but has a very responsive keyboard, a battery life of a whopping four hours and nine minutes, and the DVD drive is far quieter when reading discs. Its sleek, stylish looks will also make you the envy of other commuters when you work on the train or plane.

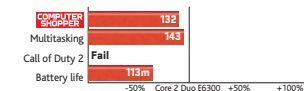
Matt Smith

SUMMARY

- ✓ Lightweight and portable
- ✗ Outdated processor
- ✗ Unresponsive keys and buttons

NOTEBOOK PC 1.86GHz Intel Core Duo T2350, 2GB RAM, 120GB hard disk, Intel GMA 950 graphics, DVD-R/RW drive, 12.1in LCD widescreen, 1.95kg
PART CODE D2200-01
SUPPLIER Hi-Grade 020 8532 6111
DETAILS www.higrade.com

PERFORMANCE (see page 62)



APPLE Macbook Pro

★★★★★

£1,299 inc VAT

At one inch thick, the Macbook Pro could be your perfect portable friend. Slotting in between ultra-portables and the weightier desktop-replacement notebooks, it has the power to perform and, at 2.52kg, it isn't too heavy on your shoulder.

The keyboard is highly responsive so you can type lightly and for long periods without tiring. The track pad is similarly sensitive, allowing you complete control as you glide your cursor easily across the screen. The illuminated keyboard is a nice touch, making it possible to type in the dark; an ambient light sensor lights the keys when it senses it would otherwise be too dark to type.

The screen has a matt finish, reducing reflections when you're working outside, but you can choose a glossy finish as a no-cost option. Colours are accurate and our image tests revealed the greyscale transition from black to white to be almost perfectly smooth. However, the screen's 1,440x900 resolution is a little low; we'd

prefer a 1,680x1,050 display at this price. In the top bezel there's an iSight webcam, which can be used with the included iChat software for video calls to friends and colleagues.

There are only two USB2 ports, but there's a six-pin FireWire port for attaching digital video cameras and a FireWire 800 port for audio interfaces and external drives. All of the ports are situated at the sides of the chassis for ease of access.

The Macbook Pro excelled at our video-encoding test, scoring an impressive 236. It also scored a respectable 177 in the multitasking test. The Intel Core 2 Duo T7500 processor and 2GB of RAM are perfectly capable of running Mac OS X as well as Boot Camp for those who'd like to install a copy of Windows Vista (which isn't included). At 120GB, the hard disk provides enough room for even the largest music collection.

The Nvidia GeForce 8600M GT graphics card ran Call of Duty at a speed of 24.6fps, meaning 3D gaming is possible. Optimising



settings, switching off anti-aliasing and lowering the resolution will allow for smoother gameplay. It's a good result for a notebook, but can't compare to a dedicated gaming PC.

Two hours and 47 minutes of battery life means the MacBook Pro should last for a train ride from London to Manchester with capacity to spare. The magnetic power cable is a nice touch; it disconnects when pulled so you should never trip over the trailing cable.

Unlike a lot of Windows notebooks, the MacBook Pro is a pleasure to use and we can't fault its ergonomics or performance. However, the high price prevents it winning an award. Acer's Aspire 5683WLMi (*Labs, Shopper*, August 2007) has a large keyboard, accurate touchpad and a similar specification to the Macbook Pro and, at £705 from www.simplyacer.com, it's far better value for money.

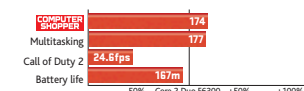
Matt Smith

SUMMARY

- ✓ Very comfortable to use
- ✓ Performs well
- ✗ Pricey

NOTEBOOK PC 2.2GHz Intel Core 2 Duo T7500, 2GB RAM, 120GB hard disk, Nvidia GeForce 8600 GT graphics, DVD +/- RW +/- DL drive, 15.4in LCD widescreen, 2.52kg
PART CODE MA895B/A
SUPPLIER www.macwarehouse.co.uk
DETAILS www.apple.com

PERFORMANCE (see page 62)



BYTE SIZE

BELKIN Hi-Speed USB 2.0 Premium Hub

★★★★
£21 inc VAT



Connecting and disconnecting USB devices can get tedious, especially if the ports are on the back of your PC. A USB hub can be much more convenient, as well as adding extra ports.

Belkin's Premium Hub has four ports. LEDs on the front tell you how many devices you have connected and their speed. You can connect USB 1.1 devices without restricting the speed of USB Hi-Speed devices.

All four ports are on the back and are close together, so larger devices such as USB flash drives or Wi-Fi adaptors can block access to the port below them. The price is a little steep, especially when the design restricts the size of devices that can be plugged in.

Matt Smith

SUPPLIER www.misco.co.uk
DETAILS www.belkin.com/uk

ULTIMATE DJ GEAR Producer Bag

★★★★★
£109 inc VAT



Ultimate DJ Gear makes bags for musicians and DJs. The Producer Bag is designed to carry and protect notebooks up to 17in, an audio interface, mics, headphones, a portable controller keyboard and accessories.

The padded dividers make the bag fairly heavy even when empty, but the straps are comfortable and the weight feels evenly distributed when the bag is full. Even when fully loaded, it's comfortable to carry. Most of all, your gear is well protected.

At £109, it's expensive, but so are the devices you're trying to protect. The Producer Bag is cheaper, easier to carry and less conspicuous than a flight case. If you need to carry this kind of kit around, it's worth it.

Matt Smith

SUPPLIER www.chemical-records.co.uk
DETAILS www.ultimate-dj-gear.com

CHOOSING A... Notebook Computer

Follow the steps to find your ideal specs

PROCESSOR: 1.6GHz Pentium Dual-Core T2060
MEMORY: 512MB DDR
HARD DISK: 60GB
STORAGE: DVD rewriter
GRAPHICS: Integrated (shares system memory)
SCREEN: 15.4in widescreen 1,280x800 LCD
EXTRAS: Wireless networking
CONNECTORS: Three USB2, memory card reader
SOFTWARE: Windows Vista Home Premium
WEIGHT: 3kg
Recommended minimum in grey

1 The minimum specification of notebook we recommend, shown above in grey, is a good starting point when working out your ideal system. This is an average notebook that should cost around £600. It is not particularly powerful or, at 3kg, particularly portable.

2 These days, you should only be looking for a dual-core processor, as it is no more expensive than its single-core equivalent. Dual-core processors, such as Intel's Core 2 Duo range, can be much faster at many tough tasks. This is dependent on software support, but a lot of applications have now been optimised.

3 Most notebooks come with 15.4in 1,280x800 widescreen displays, which are great for watching DVDs or TV. If you want a notebook for use around the home, especially for entertainment purposes, it's worth considering one with a larger 17in display. This will also have a higher native resolution of at least 1,440x900, giving you a bigger desktop. This makes it far easier to use complex applications, such as photo- or video-editing software.

4 A modem, 10/100 Ethernet port and wireless 802.11b/g networking (WiFi) should be fitted as standard, but there are also some other ports and connectors that you might want. FireWire (IEEE 1394) is common and useful for digital video enthusiasts. Bluetooth is handy for connecting to a mobile phone, but it's usually fitted only to more expensive business notebooks. Memory card readers are pretty much standard, but check that your camera or MP3 player's format is supported.

5 If portability is your main priority, look for a

notebook with a 12.1in display. Spending around £1,000 will get you an ultra-portable notebook that weighs under 2kg. Most of these notebooks are just as powerful as their larger counterparts, though some use slower, ultra-low voltage (ULV) processors to further increase battery life.

6 Some ultra-portables can attach to an optional docking station, which incorporates drives, ports and power, when you get home to your desk. It's the best of both worlds, but tends to be expensive. Others have separate DVD drives, or no optical drive at all, to help keep size and weight to a minimum.

7 If you're not swayed by ultra-portable chic, you can get a lot more for your money. Entertainment notebooks pile on the features but still keep the price under £1,200. You should expect a 17in widescreen display, hybrid TV tuner and a remote control.

8 There are features you can add to a notebook without increasing the weight or reducing battery life. A 120GB or 160GB hard disk will give you much more storage space, while 1GB of RAM will help you speed through tougher tasks. DVD rewriter drives are standard and will allow you to burn CDs and DVDs on your notebook.

9 Dedicated graphics let you play modern 3D games and are increasingly common on all but the cheapest or lightest notebooks. Look for an ATI Radeon Mobility X1600 or Nvidia GeForce Go 7600 chip as a minimum for getting smooth frame rates on the latest titles. Many notebooks use integrated graphics, which are fine for all other purposes, but use up system memory.

10 Once you're happy with your specification, start to shortlist some models you can afford. Check the weight, display size and battery life of each of them. If these are not acceptable, you need to reconsider your priorities and which features you really need.

